Jesus in Proverbs | Proverbs 8:1-36 Sermon

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Sermon Video: https://youtu.be/dMRNY44-Efo?si=lWyB1buznvuNQej7

"Anyone who doesn't know Jesus is either a simpleton or a fool." That's a shocking statement. So do I mean it? You cannot be wise without knowing Jesus. You need to know Jesus to be wise. My big idea is this… *To know Jesus is to know wisdom*. So if you want to be wise, if you want to walk through life making wise decisions, if you don't want to be foolish, you need to know Christ Jesus. Hear me out.

Maybe you're thinking, "But I know plenty of people who aren't Christians who are wise. They make wise decisions. They're not stupid." I agree that anyone can make a smart, intelligent, or savvy decisions but the way the Bible defines wisdom means that true wisdom is only possible through a relationship with God. That's what our previous foundation verse says. Let's review it together. Would you say it with me?

> **Proverbs 1:7** (NIV)
> The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge,
> but fools despise wisdom and instruction.

Proverbs is saying that wisdom begins with seeking to understand who God is (the Fear of the Lord). In this series I've defined wisdom as:

a. The skill of living (God's way)

b. The words and ways of God

I've been equating wisdom with knowing and obeying God's Word (Psalm 19:7-8; Proverbs 3:1-2). Today I want to add one more way to define wisdom.

c. Knowing and obeying Jesus

The people who first heard the book of Proverbs were called to be in relationship with the LORD, with Yahweh. But we have the rest of the story. We're called to be in relationship with Jesus. It's through being in relationship with him that we become wise and grow in wisdom.

Today we find a call to be in relationship with Yahweh that looks forward to our call to be in relationship with Christ Jesus. To examine this call I want to look at how Jesus fulfills wisdom, embodies wisdom, is the way to wisdom, and grants wisdom.

Jesus fulfills wisdom.

Today many of the points I'm preaching come from Tremper Longman III's commentary on Proverbs and his great book *How To Read Proverbs* (both affiliate links). One of the points he starts with is how Jesus fulfills the Old Testament.

Jesus fulfills the Scriptures.

In other words, when we read Scriptures, even in the Old Testament, somehow, it's pointing to Christ Jesus. Maybe it's pointing to our need for him or that he is coming, or that only he can perfectly live out what the Scripture requires. Jesus affirms this.

> **Luke 24:44-45** He said to them, "This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms." 45 Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures.

Here Jesus is telling two disciples on the Road to Emmaus that all of Scripture whispers his name. Once we read about Jesus in the New Testament, we can never read the Old Testament the same way.

I recently watched the 1985 cult-classic movie, Clue. It's based on the board game Clue. It stars Tim Curry as the butler and Christopher Lloyd as Professor Plumb. There's a murder (Mr. Body dies) and characters go back and forth between rooms trying to figure out who did it and how they did it. By the end of the movie I had no idea who did it. But that's when Tim Curry the butler stops the story and explains how it happened, not once, but three different ways.

When this movie was originally released there was a different ending depending on which movie theater you went to. But if you watch it on streaming you get to see all three. But you can imagine why it's become a cult classic, right? People want to go back and watch it again to see if they can follow the story and see for themselves who did it. I bet if I were to go back and watch the movie I would see it differently. I would see the small hints. I would see the clues. I would recognize who did it. I wouldn't be as confused by the big reveal.

We know the ending of our story. We know it's all about Jesus and what he did on the cross. Now as we read back through the Old Testament and books like Proverbs we can't help but see clues of Jesus, clues of his coming, clues of his suffering, clues of his divinity, clues of his sonship.

Jesus is the wise Son.

We've seen the theme of sonship over and over again in Proverbs as the father-figure instructs his son to walk in the path of wisdom. Well… Jesus is the wise son walking the path of wisdom. After Jesus is dedicated at the temple as a baby we encounter these words.

> **Luke 2:40**
> And the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was on him.

But the author Luke doesn't stop there. Right after this he tells a story to illustrate Jesus' wisdom. When Jesus turned twelve Mary, Joseph, and him go to a festival in Jerusalem. But when it's time to go home Jesus stays behind. Mary and Joseph thought he was traveling with company but after they traveled for a day they realized their mistake. Have you ever left your kids at school or church and had to rush back to get them? Imagine traveling a whole days journey and then having to turn around and go back.

> **Luke 2:46-47**
> After three days they found him in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. 47 Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers.

What is Jesus doing here? He is sitting, asking questions, and learning God's ways. He's showing God-given wisdom. His parents tell him to come home and he does and the story ends by saying this.

Luke 2:52
And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man. (see also Mark 6:2; Luke 11:31)

Jesus grew in wisdom. I want you to stop and imagine for a moment that King Solomon, the author for much of Proverbs, wrote Proverbs at least in part to help his own son who would be king grow in wisdom. So Solomon writes Proverbs for his son Rehoboam. But Rehoboam doesn't turn out to be very wise. In fact, he's foolish. But maybe his son Abijah will be the wise son. But Abijah is foolish too. He's actually pretty bad. But then his son Asa comes along, and Asa is better, but not perfect. And then another son comes and goes and then another son and another and another. They are a lot of foolish sons and a handful of wise sons but all of them are foolish in some way. They all fall short. But then one day, a son in their family line is born who doesn't fall short. His name is Yeshua, Jesus. *Jesus is the wise son. To know Jesus is to know wisdom.*

Jesus is so much the wise son that he doesn't just fulfill wisdom he actually becomes wisdom.

Jesus embodies wisdom.

This means that Jesus is wisdom. As we read several key verses in Proverbs 8 they speak of God's wisdom that Jesus fully embodies in the New Testament. Back in Proverbs 3:18-20 it said that God made all of creation through wisdom. This theme is expanded in Proverbs 8. Paul then identifies the creation-wisdom of Proverbs 8 with the wisdom of Jesus in Colossians 1.

Proverbs 8:22-23
22 "The Lord brought me (wisdom) forth as the first of his works,
before his deeds of old;
23 I was formed long ages ago,
at the very beginning, when the world came to be.

Then Paul writes in Colossians 1 how Jesus was also there at the beginning of creation.

Colossians 1:15
The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. (see also Revelation 3:14)

When a guy named Arius read this passage in Colossians at around AD 300 he saw this passage's similarity with Proverbs 8 and concluded that if God created wisdom, and Jesus is wisdom, then Jesus is created. So Jesus hasn't been God forever and isn't equal with God the Father? Arius launched Arianism which the council of Nicea in 325 declared to be a heresy (false teaching) and in response created the Nicene Creed:

> *We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible. And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father; by whom all things were made…*

You can hear the echos of Proverbs 8 and Colossians 1 in the Nicene Creed. Mormons, Unitarians, and Jehovah's Witnesses all hold to some form of Arianism. So if a Jehovah's Witness knocks on your door and tells you "Jesus was created, just look at Proverbs 8," how do you answer them? An apologetics organization called Stand To Reason taught me two reasons why they're wrong:

1) God didn't create wisdom because it has always been a part of him (God's character).

If God created wisdom, what was he before he created wisdom? Stupid? Did he create wisdom through non-wisdom? No. One of God's attributes, which are all eternally there, is wisdom. God has always been and will always be, wise. God didn't create wisdom—thus he did not create Jesus.

2) We should interpret unclear Scriptures through clear Scriptures (not the other way around).

Proverbs 8 is a highly poetic and metaphorical passage. It's full of beautiful imagery and mystery but both imagery and mystery can create confusion. That's why we need to look to other passages that clearly tell us who Jesus is to understand that he is God and not created. We can look to passages like:

> **John 1:1-3** In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.
> 2 He was with God in the beginning. 3 Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. (see also Hebrews 1:3a)

Jesus embodies the wisdom Proverbs 8 speaks of—but Jesus is not created. Before the incarnation, before God became flesh, the eternal Son of God was present. Paul continues to make this connection between wisdom in Proverbs 8 and Christ in Colossians 1.

> **Proverbs 8:26-27**
> 26 before he made the world or its fields
> or any of the dust of the earth.
> 27 I was there when he set the heavens in place,
> when he marked out the horizon on the face of the deep,

Proverbs 8 says God created the earth and the heavens through wisdom, and what does Paul say?

> **Colossians 1:16a**
> For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible…

The heavens and the earth were created through the wisdom of God's eternal Son, one day revealed as Jesus. And if you go back just a few verses earlier in Proverbs 8 we find wisdom's rule over kings.

> **Proverbs 8:15-16**
> 15 By me kings reign
> and rulers issue decrees that are just;
> 16 by me princes govern,
> and nobles—all who rule on earth.

And what does Paul add about Jesus Christ?

> **Colossians 1:16b-17**
> ...whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. 17 He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. (see also 1 Corinthians 1:30; Colossians 2:3)

Tremper writes, "The message is clear: Jesus is Wisdom herself." That's a rather shocking statement—but we only can say that with nuance. This doesn't make Jesus female, or a woman. Not at all. What I am saying is that Jesus is the embodyment of God's perfect wisdom, which is allegorized as Lady Wisdom in Proverbs. Lady Wisdom is a personification of God's wise character, and we see God's wisdom most clearly revealed in Jesus Christ. I glanced at one blog that didn't feel comfortable calling Jesus lady wisdom, so it called him "wisdom itself." But did you know that Jesus equates himself with lady wisdom?

Matthew 11:19
The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.' But wisdom is proved right by her deeds."

Notice the pronoun at the end—"her" deeds. Jesus is not identifying himself as a woman. Rather, Jesus is fully embodying the wisdom of lady wisdom. Jesus is embodying the wisdom of God, the rule of God, the power of God. Jesus is God's wisdom in the flesh. He is wisdom incarnate. So in that very specific way Jesus is lady wisdom.

It's baseball season and I know some of you love the Red Sox. Have any of you ever met an actual Red Sox player? What was it like? There's a difference between watching the Red Sox on TV or going to game and watching the players from a far, and actually shaking hands with a Red Sox player in person. Now you're meeting the Red Sox in the flesh. This is the Red Sox incarnate. Likewise, you can hear about God's wisdom from afar, you can read about wisdom in the book of Proverbs, you can talk about it, but to actually encounter wisdom itself you have to encounter Jesus.

To know Jesus is to know wisdom. Jesus fulfills wisdom. Jesus embodies wisdom. And…

Jesus is the way to wisdom.

You have to know Jesus if you want to be wise. The big picture of Proverbs actually points to this. To see how Proverbs points to Christ we need to read Proverbs 8 in light of the macrostructure of the book of Proverbs (Dr. Terry Iles showed me this. See endnote). At a very basic level Proverbs is divided up into three parts.

- **Proverbs 1-9** / Wisdom Stories
- **Proverbs 10-29** / Wisdom Sayings
- **Proverbs 30-31** / Wisdom Stories

This means in some ways chapters 1-9 and 30-31 match each other. Have you ever played the matching card game where all the cards are flipped over and you can flip two cards on your turn? The point is to flip over two matching cards. The goal is to match the shark card with the shark card, the tiger card with the tiger, the penguin with the penguin and so on. In the Bible first we flip over a card that says lady wisdom in Proverbs 1-9 and if we want to find the matching card we have to turn over the wise woman in Proverbs 31. Next we turn over a card that talks about God creating the world from Proverbs 3:18-20 and in today's text Proverbs 8:22-31. If we want to find the matching card we have to turn over Proverbs 30 and the other wisdom stories, which are also about God creating the world through wisdom.

Proverbs 30:3-4
3 I have not learned wisdom,
nor have I attained to the knowledge of the Holy One.

To know wisdom is to know the Holy One himself (to know God!). Then here comes creation…

4 Who has gone up to heaven and come down?
Whose hands have gathered up the wind?
Who has wrapped up the waters in a cloak?
Who has established all the ends of the earth?

Doesn't that sound like creation? God created everything through his own wisdom. But wait… There's more. Proverbs 30:4 asks a very important question. What is wisdom's name?

> What is his name, and what is the name of his son?
> Surely you know!

I thought we were talking about God and wisdom? But suddenly Proverbs is talking about the "son" of the Holy One. The author, a guy named Agur, divinely inspired by God, wrote about the Son of God, the promised Messiah. He wrote that the way to wisdom is through God and "his son" (see also Psalm 2:6-7, 10-12). Proverbs itself is telling us that the Son of God is the way to the wisdom of God. Jesus is our pathway to wisdom.

Jesus fulfills wisdom. Jesus embodies wisdom. Jesus is the way to wisdom. And finally…

Jesus grants wisdom.

Do you want wisdom in your business relationships? Do you want wisdom for how to deal with your aging parents? Do you want wisdom for parenting your young children or your teenagers? Do you want wisdom for what to study in school or what to pursue as a career? Do you want wisdom for finding a husband or wife? Then seek Jesus. Jesus invites you to himself and he will give you wisdom. He calls all fools and all simpletons to come and confess their sins and believe in him. He'll forgive us and grant us his wisdom. Over time Jesus transforms foolish and simple people into wise people through a relationship with him, through his Word, and through living in God's world in God's way. Jesus won't turn you away. Wisdom in Proverbs 8 says:

> **Proverbs 8:17**
> I love those who love me,
> and those who seek me find me.

God is inviting us to the wise life through Jesus. In the New Testament God again extends this offer to us.

> **James 1:5**
> If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you

If you want wisdom just ask God for wisdom. But you can't ask for wisdom apart from Jesus. Wisdom begins with a relationship with Christ Jesus. *Jesus fulfills wisdom. Jesus embodies wisdom. Jesus is the way to wisdom. Jesus grants wisdom.*

To know Jesus is to know wisdom.

My dad used to sit at the foot of my bed at night and pray for wisdom for me and my brothers. I'm so grateful for his prayers. But he not only prayed those prayers, he paired those prayers with teaching me God's Word and teaching me about Jesus. My dad knew that to know Jesus is to know wisdom. If you want to be wise, come to Jesus. *To know Jesus is to know wisdom.*

Benediction

Benediction means blessing.

Proverbs 3:5-6
Trust in the Lord with all your heart
and lean not on your own understanding;
in all your ways submit to him,
and he will make your paths straight.

Proverbs Sermon Series

Go through the Proverbs with Jonathan Romig in this sermon series: Everyday Wisdom

Resource Recommendations

Each of the following are **affiliate links**, which means we get a small percentage if you purchase the resource through the link. We also recommend checking out your local library or thrift store.

Proverbs (Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms) by Tremper Longman III

How to Read Proverbs by Tremper Longman III

Sermon Notes Worksheet: https://theology-together.kit.com/sermon

Endnotes

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See this table of Good & Bad Kings. Published January 09, 2017 on + The Good Life blog by Steven Jay Davis. https://www.squanlife.com/squanlife/2017/01/good-bad-kings.html Accessed August 08, 2019.

Lines of Joseph and Mary. http://apologeticspress.org/user_images/image/bibbul/2003/bb-03-31-lg.png Accessed August 08, 2019.

Nicene Creed: First Council of Constantinople (381 AD) edition.

Tim Barnett, "Does Proverbs 8:22 Teach That Jesus Was Created?" Published December 24, 2015. Accessed August 17, 2019. https://www.str.org/blog/does-proverbs-8-22-teach-that-jesus-was-created#.XVfvti2ZMk9.

Tim Barnett writes, "When it comes to Scripture, you always interpret what is unclear in light of what is clear. That is, you start with what is clear and work out to what is less clear." str.org

Dr. Terry Iles explains the big structure of Proverbs and its relation to Jesus in Proverbs 8. He writes:

> I do think that Proverbs 8 is originally messianic. This is based on two intertextual connections in Proverbs 8:
>
> 1. …Note the importance of the childbirth language in Proverbs 8 and the identification of YHWH's son, seemingly out of nowhere, in Prov 30:4. Also, the context in Proverbs 30 relates wisdom to God

and his son's sovereignty over creation, also the context of Proverbs 8. In addition to this, recall the macrostructure of Proverbs, with the sustained discourses of chapters 1–9 and 30–31 framing the collections of sayings in the middle. Proverbs 8 and Proverbs 30 mirror one another structurally in this scheme. Essentially, they are the inner frame of the book's outer frame. I think all of these things lead the reader to reading Proverbs 8 and Proverb 30:1–6 on analogy with one another.

2. In Prov 8:23, wisdom says that she was formed long ago. This verb (nasakh) is often translated as "installed" or "set up" and has this exact meaning only here and in Ps 2:6, which is about the begotten son of God being "installed" as king in Zion. Psalm 2 uses childbirth language to describe God's relationship to the king (v. 7) and the kings of the earth are to gain wisdom by submitting to the son (vv. 10–12). I think that Prov 8:23 and Ps 2 are supposed to be read together.

   The sum of all of this is that I believe the Hebrew Bible itself develops an association of wisdom personified with the messianic king. There is an interesting and controversial text that likely witnesses a pre-Christian interpretation of Genesis 1:1 that brings these various strands together. Here is the reading of Targum Neofiti in Genesis 1:1 as the text stands—"In the beginning, with wisdom, the son of YHWH completed the heavens and the earth."

Rev. Dr. Jonathan Romig originally preached this sermon at Cornerstone Congregational Church *in Westford, MA on August 17, 2019 when he served there as Pastor.*